



GUEST OPINION ARTICLE

For Immediate Release:

March 12, 2007

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This guest opinion is by State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D.

Length: Approximately 335 words

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cancer killer in North Dakota. But it doesn't have to be. You can do something easy and effective to safeguard your health – get screened for colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancer accounts for 12 percent of all newly diagnosed invasive cancers in North Dakota. In 2004, more than 400 North Dakotans were diagnosed, and nearly half died from the disease.

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, the perfect time to learn more about colorectal cancer and what you can do to fight it. Here's what you need to know:

- If you are older than 50, see your doctor to get screened. For those with a family history of the disease, screening should begin earlier.
- Colorectal cancer and precancerous polyps don't always cause symptoms.
- Colorectal cancer affects both men and women equally.
- When found early, colorectal cancer treatment can be very effective.
- Many insurance plans help pay for colorectal cancer screening.

This month, the national *Screen for Life* campaign will stress the importance of cancer screening and early detection. Public service announcements for radio and television that feature Katie Couric, Jimmy Smits, Morgan Freeman and Diane Keaton promoting colorectal cancer screening will be seen and heard on stations across the state.

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Today, several testing methods are available to find colorectal cancer. These screening tests can often detect polyps or small growths in the lining of the rectum and colon that can be removed before cancer even develops. If cancer is detected while still localized in the bowel, 90 percent of patients can expect to be alive five years later. Prompt treatment and care can prolong life – making a cancer patient a cancer survivor. I encourage you to consult your health-care provider about which type of screening test best suits your age, health history or health needs.

Colorectal cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence. Early detection is the key. Take steps for a cancer-free future. You're worth it.

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